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PENCE PRAISES NEW VETERANS DISABILITY BENEFITS IN DEFENSE BILL

Congress Addresses “Concurrent Receipt” Problem

Washington, Nov 7, 2003 - Washington, D.C.— Congressman Mike Pence hailed passage of the Defense Authorization bill today that provides new veterans disability benefits by addressing the issue of “concurrent receipt.” After the bill passes the House, it will head to the President’s desk after expected passage in the Senate.

Congressman Pence issued the following statement about passage of the bill:

“For the survival of freedom, we owe veterans everything. But in a world of limited resources, Congress can only do the right thing. Today Congress is doing the right thing for veterans in the area of concurrent receipt.

“I rise today, virtually on the eve of Veterans Day, to point out how this Congress is doing the right thing for veterans in the area of concurrent receipt.

“Since arriving in Congress I’ve heard from one veteran after another—men and women who’ve bravely worn the uniform of our country—about the injustice of losing retirement benefits for which they were eligible as veterans when they qualify for disability.

“Thanks to this legislation, in most cases, retirement benefits earned in uniform will not be forfeited simply because the veteran becomes eligible for disability benefits through the Department of Veterans Affairs.

“The Good Book says, ‘if you owe debts pays debts, if honor then honor, if respect then

respect.' By meeting the urgent needs of the defense of the nation today we pay a debt to those who risk and expend their lives in the advancement of our freedom. But by addressing the injustice of current veterans benefits, Congress today goes a long way to paying the debt we owe to those we can never repay."

Concurrent Receipt Summary

- The National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2003 established a payment program to compensate retirees with disabilities resulting from award of the Purple Heart or other combat-related disabilities rated 60 percent or greater to receive their full retirement pay and disability compensation.
- While this program made progress in eliminating the full retirement pay reduction, the conferees recognize the need for a broader solution to this practice that unfairly deprives disabled veterans of receiving concurrent receipt to hundreds of thousands of veterans.
- Effective January 1, 2004, all 20-year military retirees with a Purple Heart or combat-related disability, including national guardsmen and reservists, will be eligible for concurrent receipt.
- The conferees also authorized full concurrent receipt, to be phased in over 10 years, for the remaining military retirees who are the most severely disabled (50 percent disabled and above).
- Finally, to ensure that appropriate benefits are being provided to the nation's veterans, the conferees authorized the creation of a bipartisan commission to review and make recommendations on the VA disability system. The commission will be comprised of 13 members, to be appointed by Congressional leaders and the Administration. Of those members, more than half will be highly decorated combat veterans.

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